2003

SHE TRAVELLED

Elizabeth Cook

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi

Recommended Citation
Available at:https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol25/iss1/7
SHE TRAVELLED

Abstract
Poem
Elizabeth Cook

SHE TRAVELLED

Seated in the Uzuchukwu coach, I’m back in Nigeria after thirty-seven years. Each way I look is green — forests saturated by the rain which drenches all each day, then ceases like an engine to be replaced by … silence? never silence, but by a kind of waiting where the kiss of red-palmed foot on red-clayed ground brings hope, a promise of excitement — to be answered by more rain.

I’m heading east, to where, a few months old, I wobbled my first steps, the lines on my plump pink feet grained the same orange as my friends’. My first love — the handsome Daniel (a man my parents called a boy) returning from the market with a blue and silver paper windmill, spinning from the heart of his bicycle, an ever-brightening bouquet. The joyful certainty that this — my first love-gift — was meant for me.

My hair’s been braided; skull staked out in lines so tight I can’t forget what’s inside and what’s out. These dark corn rows straddled by wide white furrows. My head feels small and naked as a baby bird’s, me as ignorant, peering this way and that, heart filling with the view.

My father’s bones hum in my cheeks and scraped skull. I bring them back to where
he grew into himself. Fledgling
from Cambridge, he chose to learn
his manhood in this red and green.
Meant to shape a country,
he made a stab at Efik and Ibo,
tortured himself over questions of justice,
and relied on his interpreter
while loneliness shaped him.
Achebe, Soyinka, Nwapa
give me the shock of another Nigeria
clamorous and bitter as the lobes of kola
our driver chews to stay alert.

I’m learning; getting an ear
for a different English. I do not walk,
‘I trek it’. The old judge
I’d hoped to visit is away. I’m told ‘he travelled’ —
neat, contained, intransitive, though everyone
seems always on the move.

The rain resumes, the bus drives on.
The Ibo salesman
whose patter’s full of jokes I miss
sells Tiger Balm in little pots.
I fall asleep and wake up at my stop.
The bus halts just for me and I get off.